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न दिष्ठमभ्यतिक्रान्तुं शक्यं मर्त्येन केनचित् ।
दिष्टमेव कृतं मन्ये पौरुषं तु निरर्थकम् ।।
"No living creature can exceed his fate.
I believe that fate is set and human exertion is pointless."[1]
Mahābhārata V.40.30.

1. Introduction

If a self-driving car causes an accident, who is responsible for that? This question, which has long been a theme in scientific fiction, has become more real to us since we have witnessed such accidents in real life. Tesla's fatal accidents in California in 2018 are fresh in our minds. It was reported that a vehicle involved in one of the crashes was in autopilot mode; however, based on the definition the "current autopilot features require active driver supervision and do not make the vehicle autonomous,"[2] the vehicle was not 100% autonomous. Nevertheless, the impact of these incidents has been huge enough to make us contemplate the fact that an autonomous driving system is almost ready to market, which prompts us to think about the possible consequences of the involvement of fully-automated vehicles in fatal accidents in the near future. We realize that the point raised here is not at all a task for the future, but a very urgent issue in our society. The ongoing project "Consideration on the concept of 'responsibility' between autonomous machines and citizenries"[3] reflects full awareness of this pressing situation and thoroughly investigates the question "Who is responsible?" and, more fundamentally, "What is responsibility?"

As some scholars have noted,[4] philosophers in Indian tradition did not address the same topics or concepts as Western philosophers have addressed in their tradition. This is the case with the concept of responsibility. This does not mean, however, that Indian philosophers did not consider such topics or have such conceptions. Rather, we should say that they have viewed these topics and conceptions from different perspectives.

In light of this argument, we start with the question "Was there the concept of responsibility in Indian tradition?" We then move on to discuss "Is the concept of responsibility possible in Indian philosophy?" We deal with the concepts of volition (or desire) and decision (or will), which play an important role in the logical foundation of the concept of responsibility. Investigating how these concepts are applicable (or inapplicable) to Indian philosophical tradition is another key topic addressed in this paper.

2.1 The General Concept of Responsibility

The term "responsibility" derives from the verbal notion "to respond" (Lat. respondēre), which means "answer to, promise in return." The concept originally appeared in the field of legal relations and then developed into a topic of debate around the 19th century in Western philosophy. Its definition has been provided in various ways since then. These discussions often focus on how the concept of responsibility is related to (a) the agent of actions, (b) the free will of the agent, (c) the scope of responsibility, etc.

Strawson's definition, for example, is "To be capable of being truly or ultimately responsible for one's actions is to be capable of being truly or ultimately deserving of praise and blame for them."[5] This definition is based on an archaic principle called "the principle of alternate possibilities," which states that "A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise."[6] Frankfurt revised this principle to "A person is not morally responsible for what he has done if he did it only because he could not have done otherwise."[7] According to this principle, one is held responsible for one's actions only when one has an alternative choice and full control over one's actions. This way of specifying the concept of responsibility is fairly familiar to us and conforms to our beliefs, as learned from experience.

2.2 The Concept of Dharma in Indian Tradition

In Sanskrit dictionaries, we cannot find any true equivalent for the term "responsibility"' in this sense.[8] The topic of discussion, on the other hand, reminds us of the concept "*dharma*" in Indian Tradition. *Dharma* is one of the most important moral codes and is usually described as "steadfast decree, statute, ordinance, law, usage, practice, customary observance or prescribed conduct, duty, right, justice, virtue, religion, religious merit, good works."[9] *Dharma* is something that we are obligated to do. We are ordained by the scripture to perform such actions, so we are, in a sense, responsible for these actions. In an ancient text like *Manusmṛti*, it is said that the scripture Veda is the source of *dharma*:

> Manusmṛti II.6-9: The roof of the Law (*dharma*) is the entire Veda; the tradition and practice of those who know the Veda: the conduct of good people; and what is pleasing to oneself. Whatever Law Manu has proclaimed with respect to anyone, all that has been taught in the Veda, for it contains all knowledge. After subjecting all this to close scrutiny with the eye of knowledge, a learned man should apply himself to the Law proper to him on the authority of the scriptures; for by following the Law proclaimed in scripture and tradition, a man achieves fame in this world and unsurpassed happiness after death.[10] (Olivelle 2005: 94)

Traditionally, Veda is considered to be the source of knowledge. We should perform our own duties (*svadharma*) as prescribed in the Veda in order to attain our highest goal in this life or after death. The *Jainimi Sūtra*, the essential text of *Mīmāṃsā* hermeneutics, states that "*Dharma* is of the nature of an injunction (*codanā*)."[11] An injunction is a sentence that urges a person to act. These injunctions are usually known from imperative sentences (*vidhivākya*). This raises the following question: If we know what we should do because we are informed by imperative sentences in the scriptures to act according to the injunctions, are we free to choose? The answer seems to be no.[12] As the above quoted *Manusmṛti* definitely says, we have to apply ourselves to *dharma* on the authority of the scriptures (*śrutiprāmāṇyataḥ*). The authority also says that if we do not follow *dharma*, as prescribed by the injunctions, something undesirable will happen.[13] It seems, therefore, that it is not easy to define what responsibility is in Indian tradition, especially in a way in which the concept of responsibility would conform to the principle of alternate possibilities.

2.3 Karma and Determinism

There is another view that is particular to Indian tradition. The doctrine of *karma*, or the law of *karma*, is to be discussed in relation to the concepts of responsibility and free will. According to the law of *karma*, our actions are the consequences of what we have done in our past lives. In the same way, our present actions lead to inevitable consequences in the future. The precursor to this idea can be found in Upaniṣads,[14] and it has become an established doctrine among traditional thinkers, except materialists (Cārvāka). We believe that we will act according to our will. Contrary to our experience, however, our actions are inevitably a part of this unavoidable causal relationship of *karma*. Some scholars suggest that "If we are justified in our acceptance of the causal dogma, there does not seem to be any legitimate way to avoid fatalism."[15] This argument that the doctrine of *karma* entails determinism reminds us of a similar discussion in Western thought, according to which there are two ways of interpreting so-called causal determinism:[16]

- Determinism: Everything that happens, including our own actions, has already been causally determined to occur.
- Indeterminism: Persons are free to choose and have full control over what they do and whether they do it.

If we accept the law of *karma*, we assume the position of determinism. The actions we choose and whether we perform them have already been predetermined by the law of *karma*. In addition, if we consider the abovementioned Vedic injunction, we come to the deterministic view. We have no control over our own actions because they are prescribed by the Vedic injunctions. In this case, it is difficult to assume freedom or free will in the framework of the traditional Indian way of thinking.

2.4 Compatible or Incompatible

If we accept the idea that we are always coerced into an action by the law of *karma* or by scriptural injunctions, it brings about an assumption that we have no freedom at all in choosing our actions. This hypothesis is called incompatibilism, which explains that causal predetermination and the concept of freedom are incompatible.[17] Although it may seem very natural to us, this hypothesis leads to some undesirable consequences. A skeptical thought arises regarding the value of our efforts; this adheres to the deterministic way of thinking. If "The future is already determined or established and we cannot change or prevent it,"[18] what is the use of our effort? The concept of responsibility, which is intimately connected with free will and "the principle of alternate possibilities," also does not go with determinism. If what we have done was predetermined, and we had no freedom to change or avoid it, are we really responsible for it?

Ancient Indian thinkers do not take the stance of incompatibilism. Most of them accept that we live in *saṃsāra* (transmigrating lives). The idea that many lives in *saṃsāra* are tied successively by the causal chain would be regarded as a determinism. At the same time, they hold the view that people are able to cut this causal chain and transcend *saṃsāra* into a state of liberation by performing Vedic rituals, good deeds (*puṇya*), asceticism, etc., which are determined by our will.

In Western thought, this position is called compatibilism, which asserts that our freedom to act is entirely compatible with our actions, which have, all along, been predetermined by forces outside our control. Freedom and causal determinism are consistent with each other.[19] In Indian tradition, it is believed that determinism and our free will are compatible. Our will or volition could work with the causal chain and possibly affect the course of succession in *saṃsāra*. It is possible only under the compatibilism hypothesis to remove the abovementioned skepticism of the value of our will and efforts.

3.1 *Icchā* and *prayatna*

English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) interprets freedom as being compatible with causal determinism. According to Hobbes's definition, freedom is unobstructed desire, and to act is simply based on our wanting to do something. He identifies action with voluntariness. We do something because we want to do it.[20] A similar idea is found in the Indian tradition. *Icchā* (desire, wish) is an important factor, especially in Indian traditional soteriology. It is claimed that *icchā* causes *prayatna* (effort, volition). We do something because we have the desire for it and the volition to do it. Although everything in our world is predetermined by the law of *karma*, it is believed that our desire and volition to overcome this can break the causal chain of *karma*.

For example, the *Brahmasūtra*, the basic scripture of the Vedānta philosophy, begins with the so-called *jijñāsā* sūtra: *ata ato brahmajijñāsā* (Then therefore the investigation into Brahman). The term "*jijñāsā*" is a noun derived from the desiderative of the verbal notion "*jñā*," which means "desire to know." Śaṅkara, one of the most famous Indian thinkers, further notes that "desire to know" is brought about by four prerequisite means.[21] Of these four means, the most notable in this context is *mumukṣutva* (the desire to be liberated). Therefore, the basic idea of the means to liberation is characterized by "desire" in principle, without which we shall be subsumed in *saṃsāra* or the succession of the law of *karma* forever.

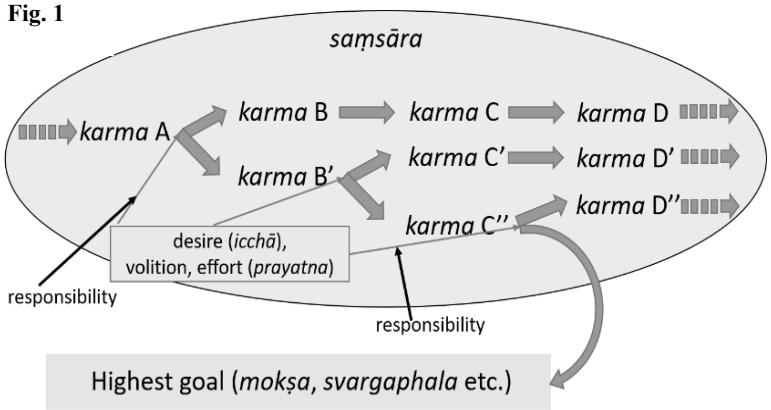
The idea that our volition can open the closed circle of *saṃsāra* and break the chain of *karma* would guarantee the possibility and value of our efforts. We exert ourselves because we desire to do so. In this sense, Indian thinkers take the position of compatibilism.

It is, however, a bit hasty to connect desire directly to actions. We know from experience that we do not always perform actions solely according to our desire. This is the difference between us and animals. Animals are driven to act simply according to their desires. Human actions are not that simple. We sometimes do not act as we desire, or we act against our desires. The decision might be an intermediate between desire and action. When we desire to do something, we decide to do it, or we avoid it. Unless we are self-determined, we do not do something even if we are commanded to do it by the scriptures or forced to do it by the law of *karma*. We do something (or not) according to our decision, whether it is good or bad, desirable or undesirable.[22] In Indian tradition, we are also advised to do good (*puṇya*) and avoid doing bad (*apuṇya*). This decision would possibly affect consequences in the future.

3.2 Decision and Responsibility

Let us now address the question of how the concept of responsibility should be understood from the viewpoint of compatibilism. In Indian tradition, as seen above, thinkers accept the law of *karma*, and at the same time, they suppose that they can change the way that the law of karma will affect the future. Although our previous deeds may urge us to do something, we are able to decide whether to accept or reject it. The viewpoint of compatibilism enables us to assume that we are responsible for our actions because we have a decision to make regarding whether to perform an action or avoid it. This notion is a

Fig. 1



close synonym for "the principle of alternate possibilities," as discussed above. Once we admit the possibility that our decision is the intermediary by which we are able to act otherwise, we must also accept that we are responsible for what we have decided to do and what we have actually done. We have no freedom in the sense of doing things at will. However, we at least have our own decisions to do or avoid something. Therefore, we are partly predetermined and restricted in the freedom to choose. Due to this restricted freedom, we are fully responsible for our decisions.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have not dealt with the notion of agency, which is another important issue in the present discussion. The model shown in Fig. 1 postulates that the law of *karma* only affects the relationship between actions and accepting the actor's consequences. This postulation is based on the basic principle represented in fundamental texts like *Upaniṣad*s: "A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action."[23] In other words, the scope of the law of *karma* is limited within self-responsibility. This point needs to be discussed further in relation to the question of what the idea of "agency" in itself is, which has been very controversial in the history of Indian philosophy.[24] Indian traditional thinkers typically argue about the self. They seem indifferent to what we do to others and what others do to us. This attitude, which might well be termed "a lack of social context," is always problematic when we think about our contemporary issues through the lens of Indian philosophy.

However, the definition of responsibility remains controversial. The basic idea that can be drawn in conclusion from what has been discussed above in relation to the concept of free will is whether we have, even if not fully, control over our own decision making. If we take the position that everything, even our own decisions, is predetermined, it would result that everything, including a variety of experiences in our lives, is meaningless; everything goes as it should. This idea does not seem natural and familiar.

In Western tradition, the viewpoints regarding how things should really be in the hypothetical view of (non-)determinism are summarized as follows:[25]

a. Things are **causally predetermined**, so they are **uncontrolled**.
b. Things are **causally undetermined** and they are **uncontrolled**. (Randomness or mere chance)
c. Things are **causally undetermined** and they are **controlled.**

As shown above (Fig. 1), the possibility of our control, though limited, over our decisions in the Indian theory of *saṃsāra*, based on the law of *karma*, might not fall into any of these categories. Therefore, we have to add one more category to the list.

d. Things are **causally predetermined**, but they are **controlled.**

In other words, things are causally predetermined by the law of *karma*, but they are, or they should be, controlled by our decisions. Under this condition, breaking the chain of *saṃsāra*, which leads to the state of *mokṣa*, should be possible.

In addition, only under this teleological supposition can the concept of responsibility be understood in a meaningful way. We are able to overcome *saṃsāra* merely because our desire, volition, decisions, or efforts are evaluated in a way in which they are compatible with causal determinism, and we have control over our decisions.

Texts and Abbreviations

BhG	*Bhagavadgītā. The Bhīṣmaparvan: being the sixth book of the Mahābhārata.* Ed. S. K. Belvalkar. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. 1947.
Brahmasūtrabhāṣya.	Text with Tippaṇis. revised by Wāsudeo Laxmaṇ Shāstrī Paṇsīkar. Bombay: Nirṇayasāgar Press 1915.
Mbh	*Mahābhārata. The Śāntiparvan: being the twelfth book of the Mahābhārata*. Vol. I-3. Ed. S. K. Belvalkar. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. 1954.
MW	*Sanskrit English. Dictionary*. Ed. Monier Monier-Williams. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1872.

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Frankfurt 1969	H. G. Frankfurt 1969 "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility." *Journal of Philosophy* 66, pp. 829-839.
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Kane 1977	Pandurang Vaman Kane. *History of Dharmaśāstra.* Vol. V, Pt. II. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
Dasti & Bryant 2014	M. Dasti and E. F. Bryant. *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Meyers 2014	Karin Meyers, "Free Persons, Empty Selves." In: Dasti & Bryant 2014, pp. 41-67.
Mohanty 2017	J. N. Mohanty. "Dharma, Imperatives, and Tradition: Toward an Indian Theory of Moral Action." In: *Indian Ethics: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges* Vol. I. Eds. P. Bilimoria, J. Prabhu, and R. Sharma. London and New York: Routledge.
Pink 2017	Thomas Pink. *Free Will: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Olivelle 1998	Patrick Olivelle. *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation.* New York: Oxford University Press.
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Reichenbach 1990	Bruce R. Reichenbach. *The Law of Karma: A Philosophical Study.* Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Notes

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1. Garbutt 2008: 365.
2. Accessed 20 Oct. 2020. <https://www.tesla.com/autopilot? redirect=no>.
3. The project (PI: Dr. Kazuya Matsuura, period 2017-2021) has been undertaken in the research area of Human Information Technology Ecosystem (HITE).
4. For example, in Mohanty's (2017: 72) discussion about the concept of freedom: "One thing appears undeniable: the Hindu and the Buddhist philosophers did not have the tripartite faculty psychology so familiar in classical [W]estern thought. Volition was often a function of *buddhi* (intelligence), often of *manas* (mind) or *antaḥkaraṇa* (the inner sense). If the same concept of will was not available, the problem of freedom could not have been the same – also because the problem of freedom arose in [W]estern thinking in the context of the theological idea of divine omnipotence (and foreknowledge)."
5. Strawson (1986: 1).
6. Frankfurt (1969: 829).
7. Frankfurt (1969: 838).
8. In Sanskrit, the term "responsible" might well be translated to the term *vaktavya*, which a Sanskrit English dictionary registers as: "to be spoken or uttered, fit or proper to be said; to be named or called; to be spoken to or addressed; to be spoken about or against, having a bad name or reputation, blamable, reprehensible, vile, low, base, bad; liable to be called upon for an account, answerable, accountable, **responsible**; subject, dependent." (MW, p. 877.)
   In the *Mahābhārata*, we see an example of the usage of this term "*vaktavya*:"

   अकृत्वा कर्म यो लोके फलं विन्दति विष्टितः

   स तु <u>वक्तव्यतां याति</u> द्वेष्यो भवति प्रायशः

   "If anyone enjoys the fruits of action without doing it by himself, he is to be blamed and becomes disliked generally." What we know from this example is that they share the idea that "responsibility" or the property "being blamed" is attributed to the agent.
   The concept of responsibility discussed in relation to the idea of "being blamed" is also presented in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II-III. Cf. Taylor 2006.
9. MW, p. 449.
10. Olivelle (2005: 404):

    वेदोऽखिलो धर्ममूलं स्मृतिशीले च तद्विदाम् । आकारश्चैव साधूनामात्मनस्तुष्टिरेव च ॥६॥

    यः कश्चित्कस्यकिद्धर्मो मनुना परिकीर्तितः । स सर्वो ऽभिहितो वेदे सर्वज्ञानमयो हि सः ॥७॥

    सर्वं तु समवेक्ष्येदं निखिलं ज्ञानचक्षुषा । श्रुतिप्रामाण्यतो विद्वान्स्वधर्मे निविशेत वै ॥८॥

    श्रुतिस्मृत्युदितं धर्ममनुतिष्ठन्हि मानवः । इह कीर्तिमवाप्नोति प्रेत्य चानुत्तमं सुखम् ॥९॥
11. *Jaiminisūtra* I.1.2: चोदनालक्षणोऽर्थो धर्मः

12. A similar discussion appears in Aristotle's Nicomachean *Ethics Book* III.1-5, where Aristotle maintains that "All and only involuntary acts are excusable." (Taylor 2006: 168)

13. BhG II.33-36:

    "Or suppose you would not engage yourself in this battle based on Dharma, then you would give up your Dharma and honor and incur guilt. Everyone will talk about your disgrace forever. And for one who has been honored, disgrace is worse than death. Great warriors think that you have fled from the battle out of fear. And those who once esteemed you highly would disrespect you. Your enemy will tell what is improper to be said about you, accusing you of your inability. Is there anything more miserable than this?"

    BhG II.33-36:

    अथ चेत्त्वमिमं धर्म्यं संग्रामं न करिष्यसि । ततः स्वधर्मं कीर्तिं च हित्वा पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥

    अकीर्तिं चापि भूतानि कथयिष्यन्ति तेऽव्ययाम् । संभावितस्य चाकीर्तिर्मरणादतिरिच्यते ॥

    भयाद्रणादुपरतं मन्स्यंते त्वां महारथाः । येषां च त्वं बहुमतो भूत्वा यास्यसि लाघवम् ॥

    अवाक्यवादांश्च बहून वदिष्यंति तवाहिताः । निन्दन्ततस्तव सामर्थ्यं ततो दुःखतरं नु किम् ॥

14. Reichenbach (1990: 192-195).

15. Suryanarayanan (1941: 82).

16 Pink (2017: 13-14.).

17. Pink (2017: 13).

18. Reichenbach (1990: 47).

19. Pink (2017: 18-19).

20. Pink (2017: 65-68). Cf. *Hobbes's Leviathan* Ch. 21.

21. Śaṅkara's Commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*. *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, p. 5.

22. Pink (2017: 62): "What moves one to take a particular decision then, to decide on a particular action, is not any command to take that decision, or any prior decision on one's own part to take it, but some reason for acting as decided – something good or desirable about the action decided on."

23. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* IV.4.5. (Olivelle 1998: 120-121) :

    साधुकारी साधुर्भवति पापकारी पापो भवति

24. Collected papers in *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy* (Dasti & Bryant 2014) argue the notion of agency from various standpoints in Indian philosophical tradition.

25. Pink (2017: 83).